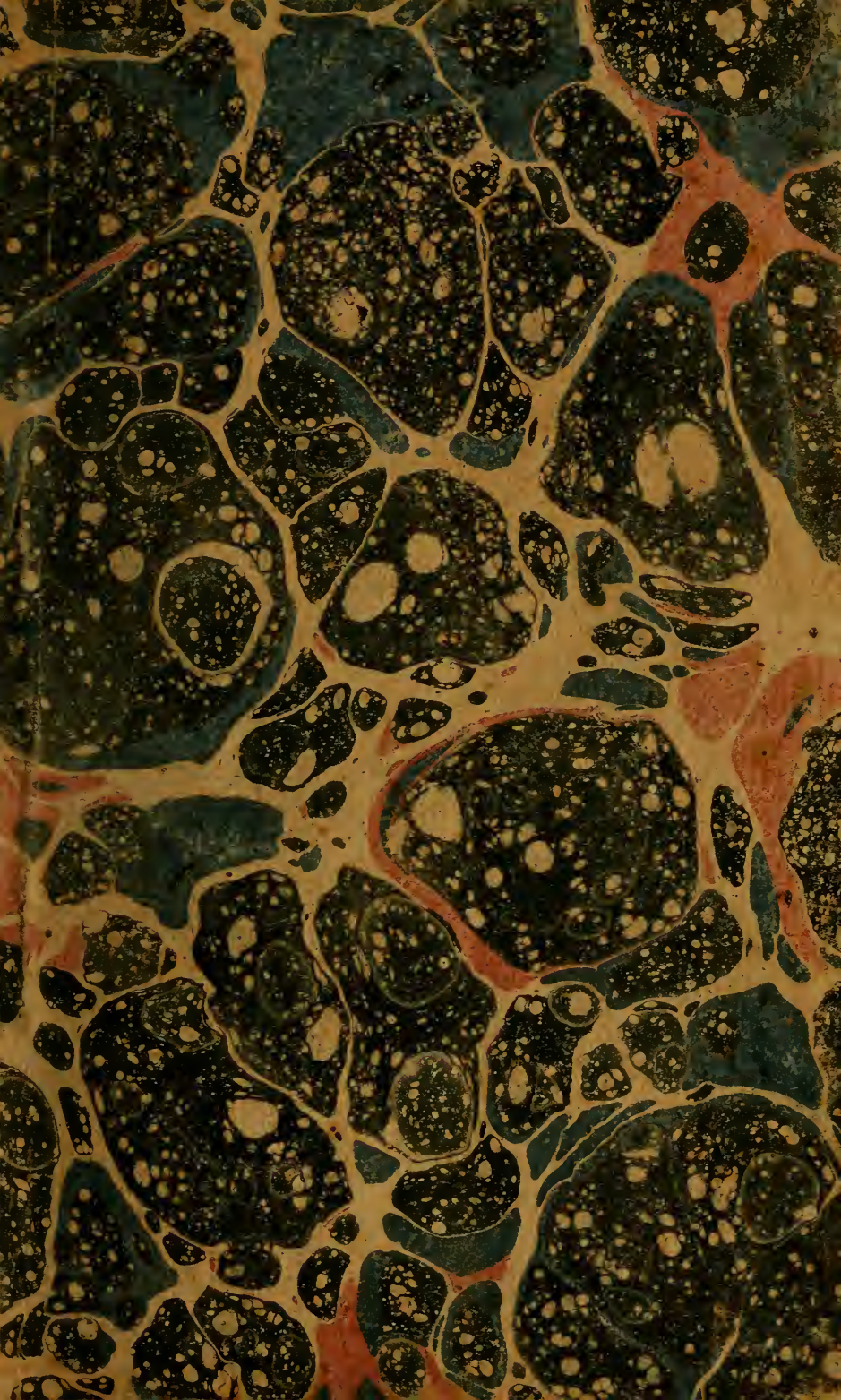

Rebecca Elizabeth Wheeler

The Mourning Husband.

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A

DISCOURSE,

AT THE FUNERAL OF

Mrs. THANKFUL CHURCH,

LATE CONSORT OF THE

Rev. JOHN H. CHURCH,
PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN PELHAM, N. H.

APRIL 15, 1806.

BY LEONARD WOODS,
PASTOR OF A CHURCH IN NEWBURY.

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1807.

A

DISCOURSE.

GEN. xxiii. 2.

And Sarah died in Kirjath-arba; . . . . . and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.

THE feelings of friendship are not weakened, but exalted and sanctified by religion. Religion subdues every unkind affection, makes the heart sincere and tender, and brings its happy subject into union with the God of love. And as religion renders men really benevolent; so it teaches them suitably to estimate every person, who discovers a benevolent heart. There are none who value a friend so highly, as the saints. There are none, who know so well the advantages, or so exquisitely enjoy the delights of reciprocal affection. Accordingly, there are none, who feel such tender and lasting grief, when a friend is taken away. Whether we look into the scriptures, or attend to the actual state of the world, we find that the people of God are *the sincerest*

mourners. The example of weeping for a deceased friend, which Jesus hath set us, is too well known to need a particular recital, too impressive to be ever forgotten, and too perfect to admit of description. Jesus, weeping at the grave of Lazarus, sanctioned all the pious tears, by which his people, on similar occasions, express the tenderness and sorrow of their hearts.

But the text, pointed out by the occasion, calls our attention to a particular species of mourning; *the mourning of a bereaved husband for a discreet and pious wife*. The father of the faithful had lived happily with Sarah, his wife, for many years. When she died, he mourned and wept. The loss of such a valuable friend, such a dear companion, was very afflictive. He expressed his unfeigned sorrow, and paid her the last tribute of conjugal affection. How amiable did patriarchal virtue appear, in the melting tenderness of grief.

It is my design, in this discourse, *to justify the tears of Abraham at the grave of Sarah, or to show, with what singular propriety a husband mourns the death of a discreet and pious wife.*

All that can be said upon the excellence and happiness of friendship in general may, with eminent propriety, be applied to the friendship, which exists in the matrimonial

state. It is there that friendship is found in its highest purity and force; there it is productive of its best joys. How highly does the pen of inspiration honour marriage, by representing it, as resembling the sacred and holy union between Christ and his church. The married state is designed by God, as the consummation of human love. Kind Heaven has wonderfully combined the interests and feelings, the joys and sorrows of the husband and the wife, so that they are one. If, therefore, bereavement in any other relation ought to be deeply felt; more so in this. If a man is justified or excused for mourning the loss of any other friend; his sorrow for the death of a discreet and pious wife is commendable and dignified.

But in order to show, with what singular propriety a husband mourns the death of such a partner, we must take a more particular survey of *the amiableness of her character, and the usefulness of her life.*

What encomium is too high for the character of a wife, uniformly good? How amiable in itself, and in all its fruits, is the sincere and ardent love, which she has for her husband; which gives her a participation of all his joys and all his sorrows; which leads her cheerfully to accommodate herself to his views, condescendingly to comply with his requests, to submit to his guidance, and to make it her favourite wish and her delightful employment,

to render him useful and happy. What an ornament in the sight of God and man is *the meek and quiet spirit,* which she exhibits. Her modest, gentle, and peaceable temper has a never fading beauty, a charm infinitely superior to that of a fair countenance and splendid apparel. Above all, how ornamental is the spirit of piety, which raises her eyes and her heart to God; which consecrates to him all her affections and all her actions; which prompts her diligently to perform every domestic duty, as unto God, and to seek purity of heart, as well as a blameless deportment. Religion imparts uniformity to her conduct, and the highest excellence to her character. Every person, acquainted with her, is constrained to acknowledge her worth. But no person so clearly discerns her amiable temper, or so highly esteems her character, as her partner. He has the nearest survey of those virtuous qualities, which adorn her mind. In her life the graces of Christianity flourish before his eyes. He prizes her above rubies. How grievous, then, his bereavement, when she departs. How affecting the moment, when so much loveliness expires. When her heart, so full of kind affection, ceases to beat, and her eyes, which bespoke the sensibilities of her heart, are closed in death; how great must be his sorrow. With what propriety does he weep at the grave of so much excellence.

But we must consider not only the amiableness of her character, but *the usefulness of her*

life. She will do him good, and not evil, all the days of his life. She is very useful to her husband, by the proper management of domestic concerns. *She looketh well to the ways of her household, and guideth her affairs with discretion.* She does not shrink from exertion. By her diligence, and by her constant care, *that nothing may be lost*, she secures an abundance of every thing desirable. Yet her diligence and economy do not spring from covetousness, but from christian charity. The law of kindness is not only in her tongue, but in her heart. Besides doing good to her own household, *she spreadeth out her hands to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.* How sensibly must a husband feel his loss, when so much industry, prudence, and charity are taken from his house.

If they are blessed with children, how useful is she in their education. She has a stock of tender affection, which never wastes. It is her peculiar province, to watch over their infant years, to shield them from evil, to cherish them in her arms, to instill instruction into their opening minds, and, by her wisdom and gentleness, to form their early habits. She is peculiarly qualified to teach their infant tongues to pronounce, with reverence, the great name of GOD, and to whisper in their listening ears the sentiments of faith and piety. How great her influence on the character of a rising family. How beneficial is she to their temporal interest. And

by her instruction, example, and prayers, how much may she do for their religious interest, for their everlasting good. How many of the most eminent saints gratefully recollect the faithful and devout attention of a mother, as the means of their conversion. Sincerely, indeed, must a father, who regards the welfare of his children, mourn the loss of such an assistant in their education, such a guide of their blooming years.

A discreet and pious wife is to her husband, *the best preservative from the snares of the world.* He cannot go much abroad, and mingle freely with mankind, without danger. *Evil communications corrupt good manners.* The examples of the licentious world are alluring; its temptations seductive. Its pleasures, though gratifying to the passions, debase the soul, and leave a sting behind. From these dangers there is scarcely a better preservative, than the attractions of an amiable partner. Through her influence, her husband is contented at home. He finds his interest and happiness lodged in his own house. There is his best friend. There congenial love yields its purest joys. Sick of the vanity, the insincerity, and the treachery of the world, he gladly retreats to *one*, whose love is without dissimulation; who prizes his comfort as her own; who can tenderly reprove, and as tenderly forgive his faults; who is never weary of his society, and knows how to prevent her society from being irksome to him; to whom

he can most freely reveal his heart, and in whom he can always safely trust. In her conversation, in her delicate sensibility and unfailing affection, in her exemplary behaviour and fervent piety, he finds innocent endearments, pleasures which never cloy. If duty calls him from home, he is wishfully expected by his faithful wife, and returns with increased satisfaction. Every short separation is followed by a more cordial and more happy union. Connected with such a partner, how distant does he keep himself from the dangerous snares of the world. How gladly does he forego its noisy and polluting pleasures.

In all *the perplexing and wearisome cares of life*, what a great blessing does he find in the affectionate companion of his retired hours. In every difficulty, how cheering is her kindness. When present, how does her conversation refresh him. When absent, how is he animated by the lively image of her virtue. Through her influence, he finds excitement and aid, forgets his hardships, and is cheerful in fatigue.

How does such a partner add to his happiness *in prosperity*. If he could enjoy the good things of this life alone, he has a far higher enjoyment of them in connexion with her. The happiness, which he sees her partake, gratifies his affection, and heightens his bliss. Every providential favour has a double value, and every enjoyment a new relish, when shared by one so beloved.

Her influence is most sensibly felt *in times of affliction.* It is a blessing, which the benevolence of God has furnished, to alleviate the troubles of life. How many sighs does she prevent. How many corroding thoughts does she chase from his mind. How does her cheerfulness dissipate his gloom. How are his anxieties and pains relieved by her kind attentions. In sickness, how healing is the power of her love, and her assiduity. How enlivening and consoling in the hour of depression. If he is soured, or grieved by the deceit, the selfishness, and the unkindness of men; her simplicity and tenderness restore him to himself, and spread serenity and sweetness over his mind. In the greatest and most overwhelming troubles, her wisdom, her pious calmness, and her sympathy do much to compose his feelings, and to support his sinking spirits.

But her influence rises still higher. If he is impenitent, her pious conduct awakens his conscience, and impressively recommends religion. If he is happily united with her in the love of God, she greatly promotes his moral and religious improvement. Her moderation often tempers the excessive warmth of his passions. Her prudence restrains his impetuous temper, and so prevents many a rash and hurtful step. If at any time his anger is kindled, she remains mistress of herself, and endeavours, by the softest language, to restore his mind to peace. It is her earnest desire,

that he may be led on to that perfection of moral virtue, to which she herself aspires. In religion, her conversation is instructive and quickening. Frequently it kindles anew the languishing flame of piety, and encourages him to attempt neglected duties. In her life he sees a constant proof of the beauty and worth of religion. Her example, in which christian grace is associated with female sweetness, softens his temper, and attracts him to the throne of grace. Her uniform and conscientious regard to the divine commands shows him, that duty is practicable, checks his backwardness, and fills him with penitence and zeal. How often does her piety and engagedness rouse him from spiritual sloth, and render him fervent in family and secret devotion. When she deviates from duty, his heart is melted by the promptitude and tenderness of her confession. While he is grieved with the imperfection of her virtue; he is at the same time charmed with the lovely sincerity of her penitence. Her undissembled humility often makes him ashamed of his pride, and her meekness and contentment, of his passionate or repining spirit. In short, she is a help to him through the whole christian course. She smooths the ruggedness of the way, and shortens its tedious length. So far as divine grace enables her to display the fruits of holiness; so far she contributes to his improvement and usefulness in religion. And as he entertains the pleasing hope, that Jesus is her friend and heaven her final home; his affection

to her, and his desire of her company become motives to persevering diligence in the work of God.

Her beneficial influence is felt by many others, beside her own family. If her situation is such, as to make her known to a large circle, her influence is proportionably increased. Here let me say, that few women have opportunity to be more extensively useful, than the pious partner of a gospel minister. She necessarily has free intercourse with many families ; and that intercourse is attended with peculiar endearments. Her example is widely known, and much regarded. Her friendly disposition is a rich blessing to all, who visit her house. She is especially useful to persons of her own sex. Other women in the married state, observing her diligence, her economy, and her charity, are inclined to excel in the same virtues. By her example, they are excited to love their husbands, to discharge, with unremitting care, every conjugal duty, and, above all other accomplishments, to seek the precious *ornament of a meek and quiet spirit*. By her example, they are reminded of their obligations to their children, and impressed with the importance of *bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.* By her example, they are led to shun all slander and evil speaking, to treat the reputation of others with friendly caution, and, as far as possible, to secure to every one that *good name*, which is better than any earthly treas-

ure. She endeavours to banish from friendly society every light and unprofitable topic, and to introduce and support conversation, which is not only entertaining, but serious and edifying. She laments the least appearance of looseness and impiety in the rising age, especially among young women, and does all in her power to render them modest in dress and behaviour, and to allure them to the practice of christian piety. Religion, in which they are inclined to think there is something gloomy and forbidding, becomes attractive, when seen in her example. In short, her life conspires with the pastoral labours and prayers of her husband, to promote among the people a solemn attention to the Sabbath and all the means of grace, and the love of real goodness in its various forms. Her religion, uniformly regulated by prudence, and displayed in the amiable acts of domestic and social duty, is to multitudes a matter of joy. Now if the influence of a discreet and pious wife is to her husband, and to others, so highly useful; how much is lost in her decease. Both for his own sake, and his people's, how deep should be his sorrow at her grave.

My respected hearers are all ready to believe, and some of them well know, that these observations are, in a good measure, applicable to this solemn occasion. Our afflicted brother, while attending to the foregoing description, has recognized the features of his

beloved wife.* You, dear Sir, having long known her worth, know best what reason you have to mourn. The friendship between you and her, beginning in early life, *grew with your growth and strengthened with your strength;* and was at length consummated by

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* This remark is not made without strict regard to the evidence which Mrs. Church exhibited of a discreet and pious character. As I have information on this subject, which is entitled to full confidence, I am happy in presenting the following sketch.

Under the benign influence of a religious education, Mrs. Church seriously attended to the gospel from her youth. In 1798 she made a profession of religion, and was admitted a member of the church in Rutland. The doubts and anxieties, with which her mind was afterwards exercised, led her to attend more particularly to the distinguishing nature of experimental religion; in consequence of which she obtained more satisfaction.

She firmly believed and humbly admired the peculiar doctrines of the gospel; and by diligent hearing, reading, meditation, and prayer, made progress in divine knowledge. The prosperity of Zion was dear to her heart. She often expressed a desire for a revival of religion, particularly among the people with whom she was connected. She was grieved at the conduct of impenitent sinners; while nothing was more pleasing to her, than to see any hopeful attention to the things of religion. After she entered into a family state, the course of providence impressed her mind more and more with the importance of a holy life. Her diary and letters show, to great advantage, her humility, her faithful friendship, and her fervent zeal to do good.

the marriage bond. How amiable her conduct has been in that endearing relation, and how useful she has been to you in temporal and spiritual things, is all fresh in your remembrance. In your solitary reflections, you will often seem to enjoy again the years of your

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Her diligence in her domestic concerns was remarkable, especially considering the uncommon delicacy of her constitution. Her peculiar kindness and attention to her husband, during a late sickness, joined with her concern and anxiety for him, and her unceasing endeavours for the welfare of the family, exhausted her strength, and are thought to have been the probable occasion of that illness, which issued in her death.

In her last sickness, which commenced in January, 1806, she commonly enjoyed composure of mind. The religious doubts, which sometimes interrupted that composure, were generally succeeded by greater light and comfort. From time to time she expressed her earnest desire to have clearer views of the glory of Christ. Apprehending her dissolution to be near, she, with much calmness, made known her wish respecting some articles of her clothing, and desired that her husband, at a suitable time, would make certain presents to her little children, accompanied with pious counsel from her dying lips. Being asked by him, whether she felt willing to leave her children, she answered; "I am. I have given them up to God. It has been my great desire and concern, that they may be trained up in his fear. It has been my prayer ever since they were born, and before, that they may experience renewing grace; and I hope they will."

After this she was divinely comforted from day to day, regarding Christ as *her Saviour* and *her all.* A

connubial state. Those years have been few, but crowned with peace and joy. She is now gone, never to return. God hath seen fit to take away the object of your youthful attach-

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little while before she expired, feeling herself to be dying, she looked round on her family, and said; "I thank you all, my friends, for your kindness to me.—I wish we may all meet in heaven." She manifested humble confidence in God, and very devoutly prayed to the Lord Jesus, *to strengthen her with strength in her soul, and to come and receive her spirit.* Seeing her husband's tears, she said, "God will support you." She then took her ring from her finger, and put it on his, with these words; "Our friendship on earth is soon to end. But I hope we shall meet in heaven, and enjoy purer friendship."

To both her children she was enabled to utter the melting tenderness of a dying mother's heart. Taking the hand of her infant son, who had been her hope and delight, she said; "Dear little child! Dear little child! motherless child! God be merciful to you, my dear child. I give you up to him. May you be to the praise and glory of his grace. Lord, he is thine;"—subjoining fervent prayer for the child.

To her aged parents, and her sister, she addressed herself in a very becoming and impressive manner, and took of all her surrounding friends a most affectionate farewel.

After that her consolation increased, and her prospect brightened. Just before she died, appearing exceedingly serene and happy, she said, *that her views were more clear and lively than they had been, and that God seemed to be gradually shining into her soul.* She finally closed her eyes with her own hand, and, with happy quiet in body and mind, expired.

"*Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord.*"

ment, the desire of your eyes, the chosen companion of your life. She, who was so discreet and virtuous a wife, such a support in affliction, a soother of your anxieties, a refreshment to your heart in all your labour and fatigue, and the crown of your earthly happiness, now sleeps in death. Your most serious anticipations could never realize to you this sorrowful scene. Dear brother, God calls you to mourn. Your loss is great, and justifies very tender and durable grief. We offer you our sincere condolence; and we will not forbear saying, *you need the help of God.* Without his grace we can neither act nor suffer, according to his will. May he enable you to mourn in a becoming manner, and to glorify him in the furnace of affliction.

In order that your grief may not be irregular or hurtful, you must be careful to mingle with it those joys, which religion furnishes, and which are inseparable from christian mourning. Yes, my brother, while you weep to behold the pale face of death, and yonder grave, which opens to receive your lovely partner; your tears may brighten with joy. Though she is dead,—the friend of your bosom, the mother of your tender offspring dead; yet your GOD, and their GOD liveth. He is infinitely better, than the most amiable wife and the most affectionate mother. May he spare to you the dear children, be their father, and make them heirs of his grace. Though

you can behold the face of your partner no more; you may, with diviner joy, behold the glory of the Redeemer, who is infinitely more comely, than the sons or the daughters of men. Though you can no more enjoy her company and friendship; you may enjoy the presence and friendship of her Saviour. Happy will it be, if he renders this painful bereavement the means of bringing you to a more constant and blissful enjoyment of himself. In all your lonely hours, may he be your companion and friend. May the light of his countenance cheer the dark vale of sorrow. May the arm of his mercy bear you up. When you look upon your little children; when you think of their loss, as well as your own, and your heart is ready to sink; then may your eye be devoutly raised to God, and may he shed down upon you abundantly the consolations of his Spirit.

Though she is so soon taken from you; yet she tarried long enough to receive and to communicate much good. Gratefully recollect all the advantages and blessings, which you received from her. With equal gratitude recollect the benefits, which you had opportunity to confer upon her. It must be one of your best comforts, that you have reason to think yourself an instrument of good to her immortal soul. For this give cordial praise to the God of all grace. This leads to another consoling thought.

Though her body is enclosed in the gloomy coffin, and though, to an eye of sense, all her excellence is now to be buried in the dust; yet humble faith sees, that *she still lives, lives in the most exalted sense.* If, as we trust, Christian holiness adorned her character; that holiness is now perfected in the kingdom of God. Her Redeemer has come, according to her dying prayer, *and received her spirit.* She is now *with him, where he is, beholding his glory*, and enjoying the ineffable bliss of his friendship. Not one of her virtues has perished. The spark of holy love, which was here kindled in her soul, has now risen to a pure and heavenly flame. She serves her God with far greater zeal and constancy, and praises him in strains far more sublime, than are consistent with a state of imperfection. Her death is your loss; but, we believe, her gain. Her usefulness is, in no degree, lost to the kingdom of God. The blessed have, we trust, already welcomed her, as an addition to their number and their joy. Nor is she wholly lost to *you.* The remembrance of her virtues ought to excite your gratitude and your imitation. The remembrance of her death will constantly exercise your submission to the will of God. And henceforth the thought of her will be associated with the holy services and enjoyments of heaven, and so tend to exalt your spirit and produce a celestial frame.

The time of your parting came, indeed, very early. But, my brother, you have rea-

son to thank God, that you enjoyed her company so long, that you had so happy a parting, and that you have such a prospect of a happy meeting beyond the grave. Blessed be God for the hope, that, after a short separation, you will be reunited to each other in a better world, where virtuous friendship will bloom in unfading beauty, and where benevolent souls will be each other's joy forever. If such considerations are duly felt, and such comforts mingled with your mournful reflections; your sorrow will not be excessive or hurtful.

It will not be so, dear brother, if you mourn, *without repining*. Let not your grief, however sincere and tender, be attended with a single murmuring thought; no, not with the least emotion of uneasiness respecting God's ways. He gave, and he hath taken away. He hath done what pleased him. God is love. We wish you the great and rare blessing of a truly submissive heart. Let this bereavement, instead of interrupting your religion, prompt you to duty. Give your people reason to bless God for the calmness and piety of your grief. Let them see the good effect of your afflictions, in your increased diligence and satisfaction in the work of the ministry. Let them see that, so far from sinking under the loss of your partner, you are stimulated to travel with new zeal towards that world, whither she is gone before you.

Her aged parents are entitled to our most sympathetic regards. They ought to be thankful, that they have been blessed with a daughter so amiable, and so useful. The Lord give them consolation. May he never leave them, never, never forsake them. May he be their support and joy in life; and when heart and strength fail, may he be the strength of their heart, and their portion forever.

To those, who mourn the loss of a sister, we devoutly wish this favour, that their life may be as virtuous, and their death as peaceful, as hers.

My brethren and friends of this society, your beloved pastor has a grateful sense of your kind attention to him, and to his departed wife in the time of affliction. It has been a great support to his mind. We hope you will kindly remember him in his solitary state, and endeavour, by every token of sincere and generous friendship, to alleviate his sorrow. And let me beg for him one more favour; a favour, which I am sure, it is reasonable to ask, and which he would estimate above every other favour. *Give him the joy of your repentance.* Let the gospel, preached by him, have free course and be glorified among you. Let his labours and prayers for your good be successful. Attend to this warning of Providence; hear the voice of God. Devote yourselves to his service,

walk in love, and prepare to die. Thus let your benevolent pastor have you for the seals of his ministry, and his crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Beloved hearers, permit me to ask, why you are assembled together on this occasion? Is it to spend an hour in solemn gaze, and perhaps shed a few tears of condolence, and then to plunge again, without thought, in worldly business or pleasure? What a profanation would this be! What a mockery of divine Providence! If you would derive advantage from this mourning scene, receive the lessons of divine wisdom. Behold this coffin, which encloses, in its dark cell, a person so dear and so useful. Learn life's uncertainty, and the world's emptiness. Prepare for the house which is appointed for all the living; and prize the gospel, which brings life and immortality to light. Let husbands duly regard the treasure, which God has given them in amiable partners, and treat them in that affectionate and honourable manner, which the word of God enjoins. Let wives remember, that nothing but true discretion and piety can render them beloved in life, lamented in death, and happy forever. Parents, your opportunity to do good to your dear children is short. Therefore be diligent, and abound in prayer. My youthful hearers, you weep for one, who was concerned for your virtue, and earnestly desired your salvation. Consider that your glowing affections, your sprightly airs, and

pleasing prospects cannot shield you from death. There is no discharge in that war. Therefore remember your Creator and Redeemer in the days of your youth. Let all unite to mourn, after a godly sort, the decease of so valuable a character. Follow her as far, as she followed Christ. Copy her discreet and pious life, that you may imitate her serene and happy death.

FINIS.

"Sweet is the scene when virtue dies
"When sinks a righteous soul to rest
"How mildly beam the closing eyes
"How gently heaves the expiring breast.